

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-17

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9997

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 3162

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

BUENOS AIRES FOR KUTISCH

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, BL

SUBJ: POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF SELICH AFFAIR

BEGIN SUMMARY. THE SELICH AFFAIR, OR BETTER SAID THE MILITARY REACTION TO SELICH' S DEATH, HAS REPRESENTED THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT THAT BANZER, AND ESPECIALLY HIS FORMULA FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT HAS YET FACED. IT ALSO DEMONSTRATED, MILITARY PUBLIC UTTERANCES TO THE CONTRARY NOTWITHSTANDING, THAT MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE FPN IS WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM AND CAN DISAPPEAR IF EVENTS ARE NOT TO THE LIKING OF THE MILITARY. THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM IS NOT BANZER' S PRESIDENCY, BUT INSTEAD DEEP- SEATED ANTIPATHY IN THE MILITARY TO THE MNR THAT PERSISTS EVEN THOUGH STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT ARE THUS THREATENED. BOTH THE MNR AND THE FSB HAVE FAILED TO ACT MATURELY ENOUGH TO OVERCOME MILITARY DISTASTE FOR THE

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ROLE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE FPN AND GOB. END
SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH THE DUST HAS STILL NOT SETTLED, SOME PRELIMINARY
OBSERVATIONS CAN BE MADE REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE SELICH
AFFAIR ON THE POLITICAL SCENE IN BOLIVIA IN GENERAL AND
ON THE STABILITY OF THE BANZER GOVERNMENT SPECIFICALLY.

2. THE SELICH AFFAIR DEMONSTRATED ONCE AGAIN THAT THE
ATTITUDES AND INTERESTS OF THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY INSTITUTION
MUST NEVER BE OVERLOOKED BY GOVERNMENTS, AND THAT IT CAN
BE COUNTED UPON TO SUPPORT GOVERNMENTS JUST SO LONG AS
TO DO SO DOES NOT CONFLICT WITH ITS OWN INSTITUTIONAL
INTERESTS, BIASES AND PREJUDICES. IN SPITE OF REPEATED
PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF COMMITMENT TO THE BANZER
GOVERNMENT
AND THE FPN MADE SINCE THE 1971 REVOLUTION, THE MILITARY
PROVED BY ITS REACTION TO SELICH' S DEATH THAT IT' S COMMITMENT
TO THE FPN, IF NOT TO BANZER PERSONALLY LACKS DEPTH AND
SINCERITY.

3. SELICH' S DEATH,¹ BRUTALLY AT THE HANDS OF THE CIVILIANS WAS
VIEWED BY THE MILITARY AS AN AFFRONT TO ITS DIGNITY AND
HONOR. SELICH WAS IN ITS VIEW A MILITARY OFFICER FIRST AND
FOREMOST, NOTWITHSTANDING HIS CONSPIRATORIAL ACTIVITIES.
THE MILITARY DID NOT HESITATE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT ITS
HONOR WAS NO LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE BANZER GOVERNMENT OR
POLITICAL STABILITY, EVEN THOUGH MILITARY LEADERS HAD TO
KNOW THAT CONTINUED AGITATION OVER SELICH' S DEATH WOULD
JEOPARDIZE THE POLITICAL BALANCE AND STABILITY. SOME
OBSERVERS SAY THAT THE MILITARY' S REACTION WAS JUST TOO
STRONG WHEN MEASURED AGAINST THE OFFENSE AGAINST IT TO BE
BELIEVABLE; THEREFORE, THEY SAY, THERE HAS TO BE ANOTHER
EXPLANATION, WHICH IS THAT SOME IMPORTANT MILITARY FIGURES
WERE INVOLVED IN SELICH' S EFFORTS TO OVERTHROW THE BANZER
GOVERNMENT. THIS DOES NOT RIGN TRUE; IT DOES NOT CONFORM TO
OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MILITARY' S NEGATIVE ATTITUDE
TOWARDS SELICH' S PERSONAL AMBITIONS TO REPLACE BANZER
(LA PAZ 2955).

4. THE MILITARY IS NOT ANTI- BANZER. BANZER IS STILL WELL
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REGARDED IN THE MILITARY AS PRESIDENT, AS A MILITARY MAN,
AND AS THE LEADER OF THE 1971 REVOLUTION. THE PROBLEM IS
MORE BASIC THAN WHO IS PRESIDENT OR WHO MIGHT WANT TO BE;
IT IS THE MILITARY' S INABILITY TO OVERCOME ITS HISTORIC
ANTIPATHY TO THE MNR AND TO UNITE IN TOTAL SUPPORT OF A
COALITION GOVERNMENT THAT INCLUDES THE MNR. THE MNR
HAS WORKED HARD TO WOO THE MILITARY WITH SOME APPARENT

SUCCESS, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEM. THOSE IN THE MILITARY WHO WANT THE MNR OUT WILL SACRIFICE BANZER IF NECESSARY TO THIS END. THERE HAS BEEN NO CONVINCING EVIDENCE THAT THIS ANTIPATHY TO THE MNR WAS BEING TRANSLATED INTO BACKING FOR THE SELICH CONSPIRACY BY THE MILITARY INSTITUTION OR ANY SIGNIFICANT PORTION THEREOF. IF COLONEL JOSE PATINO AYOROA, AN INTELLIGENT AND WIDELY RESPECTED ARMY OFFICER WHO IS NOW IN SEMI- EXILE IN WASHINGTON BECAUSE OF HIS EFFORTS TO LEAD AN ANTI- MNR MOVEMENT IN THE MILITARY, COULD NOT BRING THE MILITARY TO MOVE AGAINST BANZER ON AN ANTI- MNR PLATFORM, HOW COULD SELICH, WHO WAS GENERALLY REGARDED AS SELF- SERVING AND HALF CRAZY, DO IT? THE MILITARY OFFICER CAPABLE OF RALLYING SUFFICIENT ANTI- MNR SUPPORT IN THE MILITARY TO LEAD A MILITARY COUP AGAINST BANZER HAS NOT YET BEEN IDENTIFIED, ALTHOUGH THE BITTERNESS AND TURMOIL GENERATED BY SELICH'S DEATH MAY WELL PUSH ONE TO THE FOREFRONT BEFORE THE MATTER HAS ENDED.

5. IF THE MNR WERE TO BE FORCED OUT OF THE FPN, THE FPN AS A POLITICAL BASE FOR THE GOB WOULD NO LONGER EXIST. THE FSB ALONE DOES NOT PROVIDE A VIABLE CIVILIAN POLITICAL BASE FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS REMAINING WOULD BE ONLY SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN HAVING NO CIVILIAN POLITICAL BASE AT ALL. FURTHER, IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THE FSB, WILLINGLY OR UNWILLINGLY WOULD FOLLOW THE MNR OUT THE DOOR IF THE MNR WERE FORCED OUT. THOSE IN THE MILITARY WHO CRITICIZE THE POLITICAL PARTIES DO NOT LIMIT THEMSELVES TO THE MNR; THE FSB RECEIVES ITS SHARE OF CRITICISM, ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, THE MNR IS THE PRIMARY TARGET. ARMED FORCES COMMANDER IN CHIEF GENERAL ZENTENO ANAYA CRITICIZED BOTH IN HIS MAY 22 ATTACK ON THE FPN (LA PAZ 3125).

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INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES IMMEDIATE

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6. THE BASIC CRITICISM HEARD FROM THE MILITARY OF THE ROLE AND BEHAVIOR OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT IS THAT THEY BEHAVE LIKE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THAT THEY ENGAGE IN POLITICAL INFIGHTING AND CONSTINUALLY SEEK A GREATER SHARE OF POWER, PATRONAGE, PERSONAL WEALTH FOR THEIR LEADERS AND MEMBERS, AND OTHER CHARACTERISTIC IF NOT HONORED POLITICAL ENDS. THESE CRITICISMS ARE VALID. BOTH PARTIES ARE EQUALLY GUILTY. THEY HAVE FAILED IN THEIR PROMISE TO ACT AS FULLY RESPONSIBLE BODIES DETERMINED TO PUT POLITICS BEHIND THEM IN THE INTEREST OF POLITICAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

THEIR OWN MILITANTS ARE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THESE FAULTS IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, BUT THEY ASK FOR TIME AND PATIENCE TO WORK OUT THEIR PROBLEMS. THEY HAVE BEEN TOO LONG AWAY FROM THE TROUGH NOT TO AXT AS THEY DO AT THIS POINT IN THEIR HISTORY. THE YOUTH WINGS OF BOTH PARTIES ARE JUST AS CRITICAL AS THE MILITARY AND ARE ACTIVELY PUSHING THEIR SENIORS TO IMPROVE THEIR BEHAVIOR AND PERFORMANCE NOT ONLY IN THE COUNTRY' S INTERESTS, BUT AS A PRACTICAL MEANS TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE PARTIES. WHAT THE MILITARY CRITICS OF THE
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TWO PARTIES OVERLOOK IS THAT BY ACTING LIKE POLITICAL PARTIES THE PARTIES MAINTAIN THEIR MEMBERSHIP AND WHATEVER STRENGTH THEY DRAW FROM THEIR MEMBERSHIP, WITHOUT WHICH THEY COULD NOT PROVIDE THE CIVILIAN POLITICAL BASE WHICH THESE SAME CRITICS SAY IS NECESSARY FOR POLITICAL STABILITY AND AS A BULWORK AGAINST LEFTIST EXTREMISTS.

7. SOME CRITICS OF THE FPN ARGUE THAT THE MNR CAN STAY BUT MNR CHIEF VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO HAS TO GO. THEY BELIEVE THAT THE SINS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES FALL ALMOST ENTIRELY ON PAZ' SHOULDERS, AND THAT IF HE WERE TO LEAVE THE SCENE EVERYTHING WOULD BE ALL RIGHT AGAIN. IN OUR ESTIMATION THIS IS ALSO FAULTY THINKING. WITHOUT PAZ THERE WOULD BE NO MNR IN THE SENSE OF A RELATIVELY STRONG POLITICAL PARTY PROVIDING A CIVILIAN BASE FOR THE GOVERNMENT. THE MNR WOULD PROBABLY SPLIT ASUNDER WITH NONE OF THE SEVERAL CONTENDERS FOR PAZ' POSITION AS PARTY LEADER ABLE TO ASSUME HIS POSITION OF LEADERSHIP. THE RESULT WOULD BE SEVERAL SMALLER PARTIES, NONE WITH ANY SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND, PROBABLY, THE ENTRY OF MANY MOVIMIENTISTAS INTO CLANDESTINE OR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES.

8. IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT IT APPEARS THAT EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE THROUGH THE RUMOR MILL TO LINK PAZ PERSONALLY TO SELICH' S DEATH (LA PAZ 3080). IT IS BEING SAID THAT PAZ, WITHIN THE THREE OR FOUR HOURS OF LIFE REMAINING TO SELICH, SOMEHOW INSERTED HIMSELF INTO THE EVENTS OF MAY 14 IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SELICH' S ARREST AND WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN HAVING SELICH MURDERED. THIS STORY DOES NOT STAND CLOSE SCRUTINY, BUT MANY PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY ANTI- MNR MILITARY OFFICERS AND SOME FALANGISTAS WHO WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE IT CAN BRING THEMSELVES TO DO SO. IT FITS THEIR IDEA OF HOW IMMORAL AND DISHONEST PAZ IS AND SERVES THEIR PURPOSE OF DISCREDITING PAZ WITH THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF FORCING HIM OUT OF THE COUNTRY AND WEAKENING IF NOT DESTROYING THE MNR. GIVEN THE BOLIVIAN TRAIT OF BELIEVING THE MOST IMPLAUSIBLE IN POLITICS, IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IF THIS STORY WERE TO GAIN CREDIBILITY, EVEN AMONG THE MOST SOPHISTICATED POLITICAL ACTIVISTS AND OBSERVERS. WHETHER THE STORY HAS COME TO BANZER' S EARS AND WHETHER HE BELIEVES IT IS NOT KNOWN, BUT IF HE DOES IT COULD THREATEN OR DESTROY THE
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CLOSE RELATIONSHIP THE TWO MEN NOW HAVE, A RELATIONSHIP THAT PROVIDES ONE OF THE KEY UNDERPINNINGS OF THE FPN AND THE BANZER GOVERNMENT.

9. ONLY TIME WILL TELL WHETHER THE MILITARY INSTITUTION CAN MAKE ITS PEACE WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTICULARLY THE MNR, AND GIVE THEM THE FREEDOM OF ACTION TO PURSUE THEIR OWN INTERESTS THAT THEY, THE MILITARY, WANT FOR THEMSELVES. IN A SHOWDOWN, OF COURSE, THE MILITARY SHOULD PREVAIL, ALTHOUGH EVEN THIS MAY NOT BE AS SIMPLE AS IT WOULD APPEAR. THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE ARMED SUPPORTERS WHO HAVE IN THE PAST DEMONSTRATED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT AGAINST THE MILITARY-- FIGHTS WHICH THE MILITARY, RELYING AS IT DOES ON CONSCRIPTS, HAS NOT ALWAYS WON.

10. WE BELIEVE THAT THE SELICH AFFAIR HAS GENERATED THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT TO STABILITY SINCE THE AUGUST 1971 REVOLUTION. THIS IS NOT BECAUSE THE SELICH CONSPIRACY ITSELF REPRESENTED A DIRECT REAL AND SERIOUS DANGER TO BANZER. RATHER IT IS BECAUSE SELICH' S DEATH HAS CAUSED SUCH TURMOIL WITHIN THE MILITARY THAT THE ANTI- MNR SENTIMENT THERE, UP TO NOW SOMEWHAT UNDER CONTROL, CAN FESTER AND BE EXPLOITED BY THOSE WHO BELIEVE IT NECESSARY TO RID THE GOVERNMENT OF THE MNR EVEN IF THE FPN AND POSSIBLY EVEN BANZER HIMSELF, HAVE TO BE SACRIFICED TO THIS END. BANZER AND THE FPN SHOULD SURVIVE THIS THREAT, BUT THE BEHAVIOR OF THE MILITARY HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE FPN IS TENUOUS AND NOT TO BE COUNTED ON BY BANZER SHOULD THE ISSUE OF MNR PARTICIPATION BOIL UP AGAIN. OF GREAT

CONCERN AT THE MOMENT IS THE GROWING AMBIGUITY OF THE ROLE
OF ARMED FORCES COMMANDER IN CHIEF, JOAQUIN ZENTENO ANAYA,
AND THE FEAR OF MANY THAT HE MAY HAVE TRIED OR BE TRYING
TO EXPLOIT THE CURRENT TENSION FOR PERSONAL AMBITIONS.
UNFORTUNATELY, BOLIVIA'S POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT
SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO STAND EXCESSIVE STRAIN.
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